

Provincial Legislature Question Period Transcript for Monday, November 20, 2017

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Transcript of Provincial Question Period
41st Parliament, 2nd Session
Monday, November 20, 2017

The following is a partially edited transcript of Question Period.

Table of Contents

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault (Coe)
Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Horwath to Premier
Re: College Strike

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews
Re: College Strike

MPP Brown to Minister Hoskins (Coteau)
Re: Youth Mental-Health Services

MPP Sattler to Minister Matthews
Re: College Strike

MPP Dong to Minister Albanese
Re: Multicultural Community Capacity Grant Program

MPP McNaughton to Minister Ballard
Re: Wind Turbine Projects

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault
Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

MPP Vernile to Minister Hunter
Re: Bullying Prevention Week

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Jaczek
Re: Bill 148

MPP Mantha to Premier
Re: Grassy Narrows

MPP Qaadri to Minister LaLonde
Re: Ontario and la Francophonie

MPP Thompson to Premier (Ballard)
Re: Grassy Narrows

MPP Coe to Premier (Matthews) Re: College Strike Hardship Fund

>>MPP Lorne Coe: Speaker, my question is for the Premier. Pleased to see earlier today the government announce details of the College student support fund. It's the right thing for Colleges to give the net strike savings back to the students caught in the middle of the last five weeks. But, Speaker, the government let this College strike drag on and on, and it's time for the Liberal government to right their wrongs. Will the government commit today to matching the College student support fund dollar for dollar?

>> Premier Kathleen Wynne: Thanks very much, Mr. Speaker. So I appreciate the question from the member opposite. I know the Minister is going to want to speak to the specifics of the College fund. But let me just say this that our focus all along has been on students, Mr. Speaker. We are very pleased to see the students back in the classrooms as of tomorrow, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, I think that on a number of issues there are questions that need to be asked about the process, Mr. Speaker, particularly about the way the process unfolded and the authority of some of the bodies involved, Mr. Speaker. We are going to ask those questions in order to make sure that students don't get caught in this way again and that Collective bargaining can take place, Mr. Speaker, but we do have questions that we need to ask about the process as it unfolds at this time.

>>MPP Coe: Back to the Premier, Speaker. For the five weeks students are shut out of the classrooms, they had a long time to think, Speaker. Let me tell you, I've heard from countless students that they're disillusioned. They've lost faith in the democratic process. The government needs to put money where their mouth is. Once again, Speaker, will the government today commit to matching the \$500 per student fund dollar for dollar?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, I know that the Minister will want to speak to the specifics of the fund but, Mr. Speaker, I have to -- I have to recognize that this is -- this question is coming from a member of a party that really doesn't support Collective bargaining. The fact is -- We do support Collective bargaining, Mr. Speaker. We believe it's an important part of our democratic -- Mr. Speaker, we believe Collective bargaining is an important part of our democratic process, Mr. Speaker. The action we took as last resort, Mr. Speaker, because there was no foreseeable agreement, Mr. Speaker, and we are very pleased students will be back in class tomorrow.

>>MPP Coe: Thank you, Speaker. Back to the Premier. For five weeks, students weren't getting the schooling they were paying for. For five weeks, students missed out on potential earnings. For five weeks, students were forced to sell their personal belongings to make ends meet. For five weeks, Speaker, students were put through unmeasurable financial stress. Speaker, will the government do the right thing today? Will the government commit to matching the College students' fund dollar for dollar?

>>Minister Deb Matthews: Thank you, Speaker. I was pleased this morning to be able to announce more details of the hardship fund. Full-time students will be able to receive up to \$500. For unexpected costs that they have incurred such as additional child care fees, rebooked bus tickets, January rent. Students can start applying for that later this week, Speaker. In addition, we have -- students receiving osap, they will have -- if they're receiving osap and they're having their winter semesters extended past the normal end days, they will receive additional osap for that length of the extension. Speaker, while it is our sincere hope that students will remain enrolled in their programs. There will be some students who will withdraw. We will refund their tuition and there will be no academic --

MPP Smith to Minister Thibeault (Coe) Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Todd Smith: Thank you, Speaker. My question this morning is for the Premier. Speaker, last week Premier Wynne's \$4.5 million man mayo Schmidt C.E.O. Of Hydro One was back in the news again as he delivered remarks at the empire club, the four-and-a-half-million-dollar man was calling for higher hydro rates once again. In fact Hydro One is requesting higher hydro rates right now. So, Mr. Speaker, will the government promise that they will stop this proposed hydro rate hike now?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. So let me talk about something that I'm sure the member from the opposition hasn't read and it's called the fair hydro plan. And in the fair hydro plan, he should be aware that no matter the outcome of the application brought forward by Hydro One, the rate application will be held to the cost of inflation for the next four years, Mr. Speaker. That makes sure that we can keep rates as low as possible. We've reduced them by 25% and I'm sure that he hasn't heard that as well, Mr. Speaker, because that is helping every single family in this province. We've reduced rates by 25%, and as I mentioned we're making sure that we're holding these rates to the cost of inflation for the next four years. Hydro One and its application, Mr. Speaker, are being brought forward. It's being brought to the O.E.B.. The o.e.b.'s going to review the application but the costs will stay at the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker .

>>MPP Smith: Sounds to me, Speaker, like the government is prepared to let that 5% increase in hydro rates go ahead. They'll just borrow billions of dollars more to make sure that it doesn't appear on bills now but we know because we have read the unfair Liberal hydro plan, Mr. Speaker, that the rates are going to skyrocket after the next election. That's according to their own Cabinet documents. The Hydro One C.E.O. Makes \$4.5 million. Then he gives a speech at a swanky downtown Toronto hotel. What does he tell the audience? How this is justifiable when Hydro One service has become less reliable but more expensive. The auditor says because of aging equipment we have a higher risk of failing infrastructure. That really just goes to show how out of touch that this government has become. So, Mr. Speaker, if the government won't stop the rate hike, it looks like they're prepared to borrow billions of dollars more to pay for it, will the Premier at least tell the people of Ontario that she doesn't support this rate hike?..

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As usual say one thing and do another from the other side. So when, when the Hydro One executive was awarded -- When the Hydro One C.E.O. Was awarded the Ontario electricity or energy association's leader of the year, which she attended, he stood and applauded with everyone else, Mr. Speaker. And now he's standing here to slam the C.E.O. The C.E.O. That has found \$75 million in savings, the C.E.O. That is actually changing the company to make sure that they're more customer focused, Mr. Speaker. Let's talk about what Hydro One is doing to ensure that they can continue to operate and be customer focused, Mr. Speaker. They've actually voluntarily ended winter disconnections. They voluntarily returned security deposits, Mr. Speaker. They're doing a great job as a company and making sure that they keep the lights on right across the province.

>>MPP Coe: Speaker, I'm going to say this really slowly. Very, very clearly. We are not criticizing the C.E.O. Of Hydro One. We're criticizing this Premier and this government who gave him a salary of \$4.5 million, ten times what his counterparts are receiving in other parts -- in other provinces of Canada. Mr. Speaker, the government sits across from us and claims that they've rebuilt the system. What a crock, because the C.E.O. At Hydro One is standing up before an audience downtown saying the reason he has to come to them now looking for a nearly 5% increase is because of aging infrastructure and the government has to -- hasn't repaired what they said they have repaired. They haven't modernized the system. If they'd done what they claimed, the 4-and-a-half million-dollar man wouldn't be asking for more money to do just that, would he? Mr. Speaker, why is the Premier's 4-and-a-half million-dollar man trying to hike hydro rates to apparently rebuild the system if the Liberals already have rebuilt the system?

>>Minister Thibeault: Again, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much. Always pleased to talk about and remind the opposition about the fair hydro plan in which rates are being held to the cost of inflation for the next four years. We've also seen a 25% reduction for every single family and House hold right across the province. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, we've got families that live in rural and northern parts of our community that are seeing anywhere between 40 and 50%. And I know, Mr. Speaker, we're getting you and close to around 300 days since they said they might talk about a plan, maybe show us something. Even an iota of what they would do, Mr. Speaker, but they don't because they have no idea, no idea what to do to help those folks that are suffering, Mr. Speaker, right now with higher energy bills. That's why we brought forward the fair hydro plan. That's why we voted in favour of it, Mr. Speaker. And that's why they'll continue to vote against anything that will help the people of Ontario.

MPP Horwath to Premier Re: College Strike

>> Andrea Horwath: Thank you, Speaker. My question's to the Premier. This weekend the Liberal government teamed up with the Conservatives and passed legislation to trample on the rights of College

faculty. The Premier has underfunded Colleges for years, Speaker, laying the groundwork for this strike in the first place. But instead of getting involved, which the law gives her every right to do, she refused, letting down students and letting down faculty members. Now she's forced faculty back to work with no plan to fix the mess that she's created in our Colleges. Why didn't the Premier exercise her legal right to direct the employer and avoid this strike in the first place, Speaker ?

>> Premier Wynne: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party is wrong on a number of fronts, Mr. Speaker, including what I had the authority to do or not do, Mr. Speaker. And I just said in a question earlier to the opposition party that there are many questions that come out of this process, and one of them is exactly what those authorities should be and how we can move to make the process more rational, Mr. Speaker, so that Collective bargaining can take place, Mr. Speaker, but that students would not be caught in a situation like this again. Those are questions that need to be answered. But, Mr. Speaker, the leader of the third party is just wrong that those authorities are in place at this point. Mr. Speaker, we supported the Collective bargaining process. We wanted both parties to reach agreement at the table. When the final offer vote was not accepted, Mr. Speaker, Minister Matthews and I brought both parties together, Mr. Speaker. And it was very clear that there was not going to be an agreement reached by the parties.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, if the Premier had no authority, how did she have the authority to bring the parties back together on Thursday of last week? The Colleges of applied arts and technology act allow the government to get involved to facilitate bargaining if it's deemed to be in the public interest. The Liberal government, for example, had the legal authority to direct Colleges to reduce the number of part-time precarious employees they hire, removing one of the single biggest obstacles to getting an agreement. Why didn't the Liberal government do this, Speaker ?

>> Premier Wynne: Again the leader of the third party is just wrong. That is not the issue that was the roadblock to an agreement, Mr. Speaker. That issue had been taken off the table and was going to be discussed separately. The leader of the third party does not understand, Mr. Speaker, how the law works in this instance. We -- we left it until the last moment. The Minister and I invited the parties to come and talk to us, Mr. Speaker, and only when we understood that there was no possibility of an agreement did we ask them -- did we tell them that we were going to move forward with legislation and that's what we did. Mr. Speaker, the solution of the third party would have been to let that bargaining go on forever and keep those students out of class indefinitely. Unacceptable. Not a solution. Not what we would have done.

>> Andrea Horwath: Speaker, it's not information to anyone in this province that the Liberal government left this to the very last minute. Everybody had to pay the price for the fact that the Liberal government left this to the very last minute. Speaker, public interest is defined in the act as the, quote, quality of education and training services provided to students. It's not too late for the Premier to take responsibility and use her legislated authority to help -- It's not too late to have her authority used to help improve College education in Ontario. This clearly falls within the definition of public interest under the law. Will the Premier direct the employers to include in their submission for the arbitrator a plan to reduce the number of part-time precarious employees that they hire?

>> Premier Wynne: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I understand why the leader of the third party would want to focus on what now actually rests in the hands of the parties and the arbitrator, Mr. Speaker, because she doesn't want to acknowledge that she has no solution for getting those students back into the classroom short of having a Collective agreement process that would go on -- Collective bargaining that would go on forever, Mr. Speaker. She also doesn't want to acknowledge that the students could have been back in the class today, Mr. Speaker. Put them back in class today if the NDP Had not chosen to take their route. We left it 'til the very end of the process, Mr. Speaker. We believe in Collective bargaining when there was no option, when it was clear that there was going to be no resolution, Mr. Speaker. Then we acted to get students back as quickly as possible. The NDP Stood in the way of that expeditious -- expedited process, Mr. Speaker, but the students will be back in class tomorrow and that's as it should be.

MPP Horwath to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>> Andrea Horwath: Hue next question's also for the Premier. Nigh Democrats are glad the Colleges are open today. I'm disgusted. I'm disgusted that the Premier allowed -- I'm disgusted that the Premier allowed

this strike to drag on for five weeks --While doing nothing at all. Students paid the price for the Premier's inaction, Speaker. They paid academically, emotionally and financially. Today we're hearing that the Premier is passing the hardship fund that she promised students. Does this Premier believe that \$500 is enough to fix the chaos that she created in students' lives?

>>Minister Deb Matthews: Speaker, days being in this House is a surreal experience, and I think we just saw one of those moments. Yesterday the NDP Made it very clear that they would not have legislated Speaker, we can check Hansard. Yesterday the member from welland made it very clear that the NDP Would never have legislated them back, that they would never have imposed the end of the strike, Speaker. And now to hear the leader of the opposition say she's pleased that students are back, that Colleges are open when they are not? They could have been, Speaker, if they had decided on Thursday or on Friday. To support the legislation that ordered those workers back to work, Speaker. The students would be in the classroom. They are not. Speaker, there's only one --

>>Andrea Horwath: Speaker, new Democrats would never have done is allow our Colleges to be so underfunded that they fell to the back of the pack in all of Canada. When it comes to per-student funding. The Premier promised this assistance, this fund to students weeks ago, and today she's leading students down once again. Students deserve to be compensated fully for the costs that they've incurred as a result of this Premier's inaction for more than five weeks. Will the Premier take full responsibility and get rid of the cap? Get rid of the cap that she's imposed on the student support fund?

>>Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, of course had the strike gone on longer, those costs would have been higher, but let me repeat, Speaker, some of the highlights of what we have announced today. Full-time students will be eligible to receive up to \$500 for unexpected incremental costs associated with the strike. That could be child care. It could be an extra month's rent. It could be rebooked travel plans to get home for Christmas, Speaker. That fund Colleges will be opening applications for that fund later this week. Another issue we heard from students, Speaker. These are all initiatives driven by consultation with students. Some students have been very concerned that they've missed the withdrawal date, Speaker, that if they did choose not to complete the semester, that they would have a zero on their transcript rather than a withdrawal. There will be no academic penalty and full tuition refund, including a deposit, Speaker, for students who make the choice to withdraw after this strike.

>> Andrea Horwath: Students were forced to put their lives on hold for five weeks because the Premier and her Liberal government sat on their hands and watched the faculty strike escalate. Now today, after promising relief, the Premier is offering nothing but further confusion, chaos and hardship. Will the Premier and her government, Speaker, be requiring the Colleges to provide enhanced --Will the Premier and her government be requiring Colleges to provide enhanced mental health and academic counselling services to help students cope with the mess they've left them in.

>>Minister Matthews: Well, Speaker, it's wonderful to hear the NDP Talking about students for once, but I think in the speeches yesterday there was only one mention, the member from welland, one mention of the word student and that was when she was quoting Minister Flynn. We have in consultation with students, with student leaders across the province and with Colleges. We have responded to the concerns of students. I'm pleased with the package. I think our students will be pleased with this package. There has been tremendous uncertainty. They are happy that there is now certainty, that classes will resume tomorrow. Speaker, I'm not sure they will ever forgive the NDP For blocking return to school.

MPP Brown to Minister Hoskins (Coteau) Re: Youth Mental-Health Services

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Premier. The government has made a commitment on mental health, but I'm hearing from mental health service providers that you've ignored the treatments. There are so many who need counselling that can't get it. The government is failing them. If a child in this province breaks a leg, they are treated immediately. Yet kids with serious mental health issues, some are even suicidal, are left waiting for treatment. Mr. Speaker, why is the government turning a blind eye to the real needs of our young people who face a mental health challenge? Why are these delays allowed in the province of Ontario? Can the Premier enlighten us?

>>Minister Eric Hoskins: Well, Mr. Speaker, we are absolutely committed to providing the highest quality mental health services for all of Ontarians regardless where they reside in this province, regardless of their age, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, we, as recently as this spring budget, we announced an additional \$140 million for mental health services in a variety of ways. And these \$140 million that that member voted against. It includes the creation of up to 10 new youth wellness hubs to provide wraparound supports that young people require at various times, as they grow into successful adults, Mr. Speaker. Included \$72 million for structured psychotherapy. So that we're the first province in all of Canada to provide programs for cognitive behavioural therapy, Mr. Speaker, and I'll talk more about that in supplementary.

>> Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, again to the Premier. For the last ten years, Asia masoody has struggled to get help for depression and and anxiety issues. She spoke to cbc and global to tell her story in the hopes this would wouldn't happen to other young people in the province of Ontario. I told the family we would raise it directly with the Premier. In fact she has attempted suicide a number of times. Asia like tens of thousands of youth in the province can't get mental health treatment when they need T.I know the Minister of health and Premier, everything is rosy. But, Mr. Speaker, it's not good enough. In some parts of the province kids are waiting 18 months to get publicly funded counselling. They say everything. Fine. Imagine not having the courage to come forward with a mental health issue and being told come back in 18 months? That's not the Ontario I know. That's not the Ontario that it should be. My question directly to the Premier. I hope that it's not passed off, is to a young Ontarian like Asia, are you going to continue to let them down? Can I count on the government to actually invest in mental health –

>>Minister Coteau: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate the question from the leader of the opposition. Mr. Speaker, earlier this year, we've -- we passed bill 89. The leader of the opposition and his party voted against that bill. In that specific bill, it lays out our moving mental health strategy by putting forward 33 lead agencies in Ontario to work on youth mental health. Mr. Speaker, we don't know why the Progressive Conservative party voted against that bill. We do have some clues. There were some members who were on the record saying that they voted against bill 89 because the campaign life coalition told them to do so. I want to know from the members opposite -- and that was the member from niagara west-glanbrook that said that. I want to know from the members opposite why did you vote against bill 89 that was a piece of legislation to support the well-being of children and youth here in the province of Ontario.

MPP Sattler to Minister Matthews Re: College Strike

>>MPP Peggy Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. Speaker, while some students are relieved to be back in their classes this week, many are not. After five weeks of this government doing nothing to end this strike, many students would rather lose their semester than have to cram five weeks of content into two. This will be difficult for even the strongest students and almost impossible for students with special learning needs. Many students want a fresh start in the new year, with the complete semester they paid for and they are demanding a full tuition refund. Speaker, will the Premier direct the Colleges to provide a full tuition refund to every student who requests it and not just students who are withdrawing from College completely because of the strike?

>>Minister Deb Matthews: Well, Speaker, as I've said earlier, if students do make the choice, and we hope that not many will, but we do respect if students want to make the choice to withdraw as a result of the strike, there will and full tuition refund including the deposit, Speaker, and it will be recorded as a withdrawal on their transcript. There will be no academic penalty.

>> MPP Sattler: Thank you, Speaker. I'm not talking about students who withdraw from College. I'm talking about students who want to start again in January with a new semester. Speaker, many students are in an absolute panic. They are not only stressed about the academic pressure of a compressed and accelerated semester. They're also worried about having to relearn content they were taught back in September. The crisis in campus mental health means that students struggling with anxiety and depression will be returning to campus without adequate supports to help them. They face the gruelling prospect of a high-pressure year ashortened Christmas break and no spring break to recharge. Speaker, will the Premier commit today to making emergency and enhanced mental health supports available for the College students whose mental health and well-being.

>>Minister Matthews: Speaker, I think it's important that people in positions every leadership, like every single person in this House, actually supports students. The Colleges are doing a very good job working to make sure students can successfully complete their semester. They have recovery plans. To suggest that they're cramming five weeks' work into two weeks just simply isn't accurate, speaker. It's our job to support those students O complete their semester to get on with their lives. I have to say it's pretty rich hearing this coming from a party who said they would not ever order workers back, speaker. This strike had to come to an end. It was the right time. We had exhausted all other options, speaker. Students will be back tomorrow and that's a very good thing. into two weeks just simply isn't accurate, Speaker. It's our job to support those students O complete their semester to get on with their lives. I have to say it's pretty rich hearing this coming from a party who said they would not ever order workers back, Speaker. This strike had to come to an end. It was the right time. We had exhausted all other options, Speaker. Students will be back tomorrow and that's a very good thing.

MPP Dong to Minister Albanese Re: Multicultural Community Capacity Grant Program

>>MPP Han Dong: Thank you, Speaker. My question is for the Minister of citizenship and immigration. My riding every Trinity- Spadina and our province as a whole has a very diverse population. In fact Canada's 2016 census sod that more than half of Torontonians identified as visible minorities -- showed. This diversity makes us a stronger and more successful province. However, we must recognize that many diverse and newcomers communities continue to exp Erience Barriers to inclusion that must be overcome to ensure that all Ontarians have the opportunity to fully participate in all aspects of life in our province. Mr. Speaker, through you to the Minister, can she tell us what is her ministry doing in helping community-based organizations who are in unique position to help newcomers, refugees, cultural -- Involved in our province civic, cultural and economic life?

>>Minister Laura Albanese: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to thank the member from Trinity- Spadina for his question and his advocacy towards newcomers. Community based -- Thank you. Community based organizations work at the local level to improve the life of individuals. In June of this year, our ministry launched the multicultural community capacity grant to help ethnocultural organizations advance diversity and reduce Barriers to inclusion. I was very please today have the member from Trinity- Spadina and the member for Beaches- East York join me recently at the regent park focus youth media arts centre in Toronto, where we announced the first recipient of the multicultural community capacity grant program. Mr. Speaker, just over \$3 million in grants ranging from 1,000 to \$8,000 were' warded to \$46 -- to 465 worthy organizations across Ontario.

>>MPP Dong: Thank you, Speaker. I want to thank the Minister for the answer. It was wonderful to see the microcosm of society represented at reej event park focused youth media arts centre last week. There was a group of truly worthy organizations looking to promote diversity and inclusion, including a group from my own riding. Our riding had 20 successful multicultural capacity grant applicants. I'm proud to represent a riding where so many are passionate about growing their community. Mr. Speaker, can the Minister speak to the influx of applications for the program and how her ministry will attempt to support the numerous groups from across the province who wish to help --Promote diversity and inclusion in Ontario.

>>Minister Albanese: Once again I'd like to thank the member for his question. Mr. Speaker, our ministry was extremely pleased to see the high level of interest in the multicultural community capacity grant program. While we were able to help many organizations like the ones highlighted by the member from Trinity- Spadina, there are many more valuable projects out there, and that's why I was pleased to also announce that the application process for the 2018/19 proposal is now open for eligible not-for-profits. Mr. Speaker, this grant is an excellent opportunity for organizations to facilitate community engagement, social integration, volunteerism to promote social connections and employment networking. These modest grants support valuable and innovative projects that promote intercultural understanding. And reduce Barriers to participation in community life. By working together we make our organizations stronger and more inclusive, Mr. Speaker .

MPP McNaughton to Minister Ballard Re: Wind Turbine Projects

>>MPP Monte McNaughton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My question today is for the Minister of energy. In my riding of Lambton-kent- Middlesex, your ministry is pushing ahead with two new industrial wind turbine developments, the north Kent one and otter creek wind farms. These wind farms will generate electricity we don't need and contribute to pushing hydro bills even higher than they already have. These developments include turbines almost 200 metres high with foundations that require pile driving into black shale bedrock, rock containing heavy metals. This bedrock carries water of the aquifer. Since the start of construction on the north Kent project, 14 water wells have become turbid and undrinkable. Mr. Speaker, we've seen the impact of pile driving into black shale from the north Kent project. Why is the Minister allowing construction to continue there, and why is he jeopardizing the drinking water of another community by going forward with the otter creek project?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. I'll happy to speak in some generalities around the need for wind turbines and the very vigorous approach that our government puts in place to make sure that the turbines are sited safely and that there is a good, strong consultation with the community. You know, Speaker, we take the concerns regarding the environment and human health very seriously, and I'll say that we adhere to a very strict renewable energy approvals process. So, you know, special, thanks to clean air and clean energy and let me speak to the fundamentals for a second. Ontario has saved more than \$4 billion in annual health and environmental costs. Because of our commitment, because of this government's commitment to clean energy. You know -- We can't sit idly bligh. Renewable energy projects they are a necessity and crucial part of our whole carbon switch, Speaker. And we're not going to back down to --

>> MPP McNaughton Back to the Minister of energy. These wind farms will forever and through production on some of the best agricultural land in our country. And we are talking about an environmentally sensitive area, home to 24 species at risk and within a major flight path for migratory birds. It is fragmenting the bedrock, turning clear, clean water into dirty undrinkable swill. Yet the project is going ahead. Even though the government has suspended the large renewable procurement two process, because there's no need for additional electricity. When the Minister made that announcement in September of 2016, I said that north Kent one and otter creek should be cancelled as well. Had the Minister cancelled these two projects the long-term savings would amount to \$570 million. If stopping turbine construction makes economic, environmental AI and public health sense, why would the Minister of energy sign off on continuing to build industrial wind farms in my riding of Lambton-kent- Middlesex?

>>Minister Ballard: Well, thank you, Speaker. Thanks for the opportunity to follow up on the north Kent wind farm. Again I'm going to reiterate, Speaker, our government takes these concerns regarding groundwater quality very seriously. The renewable energy approval process in fact requires proponents, requires these proponents to undertake extensive consultation with municipalities, indigenous communities and the public, Mr. Speaker, and additionally we have taken a very cautious, science-based approach when setting the standards for renewable energy projects in order to protect the health of the Ontario people. You know, Speaker, the proponent in this case has done extensive monitoring prior to construction, and we're going to require them to continue to monitor the vibration data closely. During construction, an option of the wind turbines. You know, we require the company to conduct additional water quality assessments, Speaker, and we have --keep an eye on this

MPP Tabuns to Minister Thibeault Re: Hydro-Rate Reduction Plan

>>MPP Peter Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, my question to the Premier. Last week the C.E.O. Of the privatized Hydro One defended sharp rate increases he's seeking to benefit investors. He told the empire club that the rate increases were needed for capital investments to keep the system reliable. But the Ontario energy board didn't believe this. They told Hydro One to reduce its revenue demands. Hydro One has basically refused and came back with nearly the same demand. Let's be clear. Hydro One is not seeking this money to improve service. It wants this money so it can build an empire, including its ridiculous \$6 billion purchase of Avis tax. Why is the Premier allowing Hydro One to expand its monopoly at ratepayers' expense?

>>Minister Glenn Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to Hydro One's ask into the O.E.B., it is just that, Mr. Speaker ,. It's an ask and the O.E.B. Will do its due diligence and again review this

application. But let's be clear, Mr. Speaker. The fair hydro plan talks about the 25% reduction that we've brought forward for all families right across this province, all residences, Mr. Speaker. And then of course for 500,000 small businesses and farms. That 25% is taking effect and then the cost, Mr. Speaker, will rise only by the cost of inflation for the next four years. So, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One is looking at what its needs are. It's put forward its plans to continue to make our system reliable. We spent \$70 billion making sure we could rebuild this system, Mr. Speaker. And we need to continue to maintain it. That's what this ask is about. The O.E.B. Will review it with always making sure that it keeps the best interests of customers in mind, Mr. Speaker.

>>MPP Tabuns: Thank you, Speaker. Again for the Premier. Two years ago the Premier promised us Hydro One would lower hydro rates -- excuse me -- after it became a private corporation. But the privatized Hydro One refuses to lower rates even, even after the Premier gave it a \$2.6 billion tax cut. In fact Hydro One's taking the Ontario energy board to court so it can keep 100% of that tax break and leave nothing for ratepayers. It's refusing to be regulated by the O.E.B. And demanding sharp rate increases in order to expand its monopoly, while doing nothing to improve its performance for Ontario families and businesses. Will the Premier finally admit her sell-off of Hydro One has been a complete failure?

>>Minister Thibeault: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The ownership of Hydro One does not change how rates are reviewed by the O.E.B., Mr. Speaker. It also does not change the fact that rates will only go up by the rate of inflation, Mr. Speaker, not by the fear mongering coming from the NDP. But let's look very clearly at what's happened with Hydro One rates, Mr. Speaker. Urban customers have seen a 25% reduction, Mr. Speaker, just like every other family right across the province. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, the rates for Hydro One r1 and r2 customers have dropped between 40 and 50%, Mr. Speaker. That is a huge reduction for those families. On top of that, Mr. Speaker, Hydro One has voluntarily stepped forward and cancelled the winter disconnections. They've stepped forward and voluntarily ended the security deposits, Mr. Speaker. When it comes to seeing a company grow, they're actually growing and becoming more customer focused and making sure the money that we got from the broadening of the ownership that we can use to build infrastructure right across the province.

MPP Vernile to Minister Hunter Re: Bullying Prevention Week

>>MPP Daiene Vernile: My question is for the Minister of education. November the 19th to the 25th is bullying awareness and prevention week. Our government is taking steps to address and prevent bullying in Ontario schools, including in my riding of Kitchener centre. Speaker, in 2012 we passed the accepting schools act that requires school boards to introduce measures to prevent and address inappropriate student behaviour. This very important piece of legislation is intended to make every school in Ontario a safe, inclusive and accepting place to learn while attempt supporting every student to have the right support to reach their full potential. Speaker, could the Minister please tell this House how we are supporting receive schools during the school year and especially during bullying awareness prevention week?

>>Minister Mitzi Hunter: Thank you, Speaker. I'm pleased to rise in the House this morning to recognize bullying awareness prevention week that begins today. And I want to thank the member from Kitchener centre. I know that when the Premier first appointed me as Minister of education, I had an opportunity to visit a brand-new school, Vista Hills public school in your ridings, and how thrilled was I in that safe, accepting and inclusive school environment where all school leaders were focused on a safe and accepting school environment. Mr. Speaker, our government believes in supporting student achievement and well-being with a safe, inclusive and accepting learning environment for all students. As Minister of education I try to visit at least one school a week and I have seen students, educators and families across Ontario working together to make our schools welcoming for everyone. In January I visited lecole secondaire public de la Salle --And I saw how a student-led initiative was under way including a gender neutral washroom. I'm encouraging educators across the province to spend time talking --

>>MPP Vernile: I would like to thank the Minister for her visit to my community recently. She was a big hit. Speaker, at an early age, Ontario students do learn how important it is to respect one another. This fosters a sense of success and belonging for all students. Schools are participating in bullying awareness and

prevention week, affecting positive change in student achievement and well-being. For example College catholique mer blue in orléans has undertaken a school wide initiative. It's focused on caring, empathy and emotional support throughout the year. They're offering a series of classes, Speaker, for all teachers and students. They're learning about self acceptance and cyberbullying prevention. This is a great example of a safe, inclusive and accepting schools in action. Speaker, could the Minister please tell us more on how we're promoting safe and accepting schools and how we can all play a part in bullying awareness and prevention in Ontario?

>>Minister Hunter: Mr. Speaker, by promoting a respect for all students, regardless of background, identity or personal circumstance, Ontario schools are fostering safe and inclusive places to learn. And as we recognize bullying awareness and prevention week, I am pleased to share with you that this year's Premier's award for accepting schools application will be open. Mr. Speaker, these awards showcase the initiative, creativity and leadership that safe and accepting school teams have shown. To recognize the work of a safe and accepting schools team, I encourage all members of the school community to visit the ministry of education's website tomorrow, when the nomination periods begin. I also encourage every member of this House to participate in antibullying activities planned this week in your local schools and to promote the Premier's awards for safe and accepting schools. Let's work together. To make our schools a safe and accepting place for all students, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

MPP Pettapiece to Minister Jaczek Re: Bill 148

>>MPP Randy Pettapiece: Thankou, Speaker. My question is to the Minister of community and social services. Last spring the government introduced bill 148, making drastic changes to employment and labour laws. They did no-cost benefit analysis. Speaker no-cost benefit analysis. And now social service agencies face millions in new costs, unfunded costs. Oasis, which represents nearly 200 agencies in the developmental service sector told the government and I quote -- without increased funding to the sector by the relevant ministries, bill 148 threatens the sector's ability to carry out its work. It cannot be overstated this will have an impact on the lives of the people served by this sector, end quote. Speaker, why does the Minister not speak up against a bill that threatens the very people she's supposed to protect?

>>Minister Helena Jaczek: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I and we on this side of the House of course are extremely proud of bill 148 and the types of protections that are provided in that bill for some of the workers in our province who are working for minimal wage at the moment, minimum wage and also in precarious employment. So of course the provisions of this bill are extremely important to all vulnerable Ontarians. And in particular, as it relates to the agencies that my ministry has transfer payment agreements with, of course we're working with them and looking at the impact that that bill will have on services. That conversation continues and we're extremely aware of some of the comments of the agencies have made. Thank you.

>>MPP Pettapiece: Thank you, Speaker. Speaker, the Minister 's not listening to oasis and its members. It sounds like she's just speaking up for the Premier. Many agencies are not seen a core funding increase for nine years and now oasis estimates bill 148 will add at least \$55.96 million in new costs. One example community living Toronto expects a reduction of 80,000 service hours a year through the loss of 40 plus full-time positions. Oasis and others have made practical suggestions but so far their efforts have been met with silence. I wrote the Minister last summer about this issue and she replied and I quote -- I have also heard the trepidation amongst agencies, but she offers no solution to offset their costs. If the Minister can really hear the trepidation, why won't she do something about it?

>>Minister Jaczek: Well, again, Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the provisions of bill 148 and we certainly stand behind our leader and we're totally united on this side of the House in terms of those important provisions. As it relates to the agencies we're working with them. We're listening to them. We are obviously looking at potential impact on some of the situations that do occur with these agencies caring for those with developmental disabilities and vulnerable people. Obviously there are requirements for shift work for some urgent situations that need to be addressed, and we will continue to work with the agencies. I meet with them regularly. We certainly on this side of the House are listening, and it's quite clear that we will continue to work together with them on a solution. Thank you.

MPP Mantha to Premier Re: Grassy Narrows

>>MPP Michael Mantha: Thank you, Speaker. My question is to the Premier. We recently learned that the Liberal government has confirmation that grassy narrows first nation is still being exposed to Mercury poisoning through the contamination of the Wabigoon river. But the Premier said that the report that confirms this delivered to the government in September of 2016 never made it to her desk. The Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation said it wasn't a communication breakdown and that the ministries don't -- and I quote -- keep the Premier up to date in the dark. But if the Premier is to be believed, that is exactly what happened. This is a glaring mistake that shines inconceivable in the ministry of indigenous relations and reconciliation and this Liberal government in general. Why didn't the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation. Tell the Premier that he had confirmation of a systematic poisoning of an entire indigenous community?

>> Premier Wynne: Speaker, this is an extremely important issue. What happened at grassy narrows decades ago, Mr. Speaker, has to be rectified. When I was Minister of then Aboriginal affairs, Mr. Speaker, I travelled to grassy narrows. I met with the community. I met with the chief, Mr. Speaker. I came back to the ministry and we -- you know, we work to determine, Mr. Speaker, if there was science available that it would allow us to -- one of the things we were concerned about, Mr. Speaker, was the disturbing of Mercury in the water system would actually make the situation worse. As soon, Mr. Speaker, as I learned through a meeting with David Suzuki and the Dr. John Rude, Mr. Speaker, we learned that there was new science -- John Rude, that there was new science, the ability to clean up the system. That's why this \$85 million, Mr. Speaker, that is set aside. At work. The scientists are there, Mr. Speaker. That cleanup is beginning. This has to be rectified, Mr. Speaker, and we are the government that has acted on that.

>>MPP Mantha: Again to the Premier. The Premier is just one person. She has an entire team of staff, Cabinet Ministers working for her. It's hard to believe that no one in the Liberal government thought that this information was important or that it would save indigenous lives. This report should have raised alarm bells throughout this entire Liberal government. What disciplinary action is the Premier planning for her Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation for this potentially life threatening oversight?

>> Premier Wynne: You know, Mr. Speaker, there should have been alarm bells in the 1970s. There should have been alarm bells in the 1980s. There should have been alarm bells in the 1990s, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the fact is it has taken until now for this government to act. Because previous governments did not take action, Mr. Speaker. And you know what? The reality is that it was not clear exactly what the science was, exactly what action should be taken but we have now taken action. This was a poisoning of a water system, Mr. Speaker, that should not have happened. When it does, Mr. Speaker, it raises huge cautionary notes in terms of how we go forward, how we continue to work with our indigenous -- with indigenous peoples, Mr. Speaker, to make sure that such a thing never happens again. And that is why, that is why the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation spent so much of his time. Working with communities, working with chiefs. We're going to be meeting with the chiefs of Ontario today, Mr. Speaker, because we know that those relationships have to change and so that something like this never happens again.

MPP Qadri to Minister LaLonde Re : Ontario and la Francophonie

>>MPP Shafiq Qadri: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. This question is for the Minister of Francophone affairs the Honourable Marie-France Lalonde. A year ago, Ontario became an observer nation in the nation of la francophonie. It was a historic moment for all franco-ontarians as well as for Ontario. I'm very proud to ask this question because in fact, in my riding, I have a very active francophone population., Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of francophone affairs remind us of the importance of this event?

>>Minister Marie-France Lalonde: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to thank the member for Etobicoke North for his question. On November 26, 2016, I had the honour of representing Ontario, along with the Premier, at the first summit of the organization of la francophonie in Madagascar. I would like to thank Québec, New Brunswick as well as the federal government and the 83 members of this organization, which supported our candidacy. During this summit by video, I was able to directly address the leaders of

the members of this organization. Our participation in this organization represents an unusual opportunity for Ontario and one of the most significant realizations of Ontario. Ontario will be able to showcase itself before the members of this country. This is more than 2 billion people. It's an excellent and unique opportunity we become a member of this international organization and to move forward its priorities.

>>MPP Qaadri:, Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister for her answer. It's a pleasure to recognize franco-ontarian community on the international scale, as well as to recognize the role played by Québec, new Brunswick and the federal government. By interacting with the NDP Members of this organization, it seems Ontario will have more opportunities than ever with respect to the franco-ontarian population and for Ontario in general. Can the Minister tell us more about the effects and the opportunities with respect to our status as an observer state of this organization?

>> Minister Lalonde: Again I'd like to thank the member of Etobicoke North for his commitment with respect to franco-ontarians. Since we became a member, we have showcased the profile of our province and showcased various important international events. The Montreal conference and various other events of this organization. We expect our interests with respect to two specific areas, education and training, as well as equality between the sexes. We recently sent a delegation of six business women from various regions of the province to the women's conference of la francophonie in Romania which facilitated the creation of partnerships between the economic society of Ontario and la francophonie. We have a bilateral agreement to discuss future possibilities with the representatives of dozens of countries, Mr. Speaker. Our status member of this organization shows that there's a great momentum for la francophonie in Ontario.

MPP Thompson to Premier (Ballard) Re: Grassy Narrows

>>MPP Lisa Thompson: My question's for the Premier. Last Wednesday the Canadian press reported despite the Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation receiving a report in September of 2016 about cleanup of the near creek contamination in the English wab begoon river upstream from the grassy nations first nation the Premier had the audacity to say she never saw the report. Speaker, the report in its entirety can be found with a simple two-minute Google search. This is an issue which the government has had more than a decade to address. Is the Premier really saying that there's an entire year of inaction on this issue, because her office can perform a simple Google search?

>> Premier Wynne: Well, Mr. Speaker, I not Minister of indigenous relations will want to speak to this. But I just need to reinforce what I said in the previous answer, Mr. Speaker. What happened at grassy narrows and the Mercury poisoning in the water, Mr. Speaker, that we all know is a hugely problematic thing for the community surrounding that area, Mr. Speaker. That, you know, should have not have happened in the first place, and then decade after decade, Mr. Speaker, there was no action taken. Part of the reason for that was that it wasn't clear exactly what the science was to get that Mercury cleaned up. We know now, Mr. Speaker, what has to be done. We have set aside \$85 million. That \$85 million, Mr. Speaker, is already working. There are scientists there, Mr. Speaker, who are getting ready to put the infrastructure and the mechanisms in place to get that cleaned up, Mr. Speaker. Premier Wynne: There's more that needs to be done. We had understand that. That's why we have set aside that money. We are the government that is taking action ton cleaning up what should never have happened in the first place, Mr. Speaker .

>> MPP Thompson: Speaker, this is an issue about competency and trust. This report -- and I'm going back to the Premier with this -- this report, yes. It's the foundation of an \$85 million cleanup fund, an important part of reconciliation with the grassy narrows and B.C. Firstmation nations. Yet the Premier admits she knew nothing about this plan just last week. So this is very unsettling, Speaker. We would expect a Premier to have command of all of her file. Who is to blame for this incompetency? And what is going to happen? Is it the Premier's office or the Minister ? Who's going to be fired over this inaction?

>>Minister Chris Ballard: Thank you, Speaker. It's an opportunity for me to talk about some of the things that are happening in grassy narrows. Hike my -- like my predecessor and Minister of indigenous relations and reconciliation and the Prime Minister , our priority has been grassy narrows. It was the first community I visited when I became Minister of environment and climate change. We've been working, Speaker, with

that community and wabaseamong community for many years to identify Mercury, to put the right science in place so that we can begin the remediation, the Mercury remediation of the wab buy gone English river system. Wab goon. We got the dead dedicated \$85 million fund. We've already put in place 5.2 million dollars. We have drilled on-site testing right now.